



# HOKUSAI

*September 23–November 15, 1998*



# HIROSHIGE

*November 21, 1998–January 17, 1999*

GREAT JAPANESE PRINTS  
FROM THE JAMES A. MICHENER COLLECTION, HONOLULU ACADEMY OF ARTS



## INTRODUCTION

Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849) and Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858) are perhaps Japan's most famous artists. Despite differences in their ages and styles, they were contemporaries who brought the theme of landscape to unprecedented heights in Japanese art.

The prints in this exhibition depict the famous sights of nineteenth-century Japan and the people who visited them.

## THE EDO PERIOD (1615–1868)

After centuries of civil war and internal strife, Japan was forcibly unified in 1615 by Tokugawa Ieyasu. Ieyasu established a military government, or shogunate, in Edo (present day Tokyo), transforming a previously sleepy town into the administrative center of Japan. It is from this city that the Edo period derives its name.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Edo boasted a population of one million, making it the largest metropolis in the world. It was home to a vibrant urban culture and thriving economy, which gave rise to a new group of educated art patrons from the working class with an eye for art forms depicting their world (fig. 1). The color woodblock print, commonly referred to as *ukiyo-e* or “pictures of the floating world,” provided art for this group. These prints were mass-produced and inexpensive (one print cost the same as a bowl of rice), and were enthusiastically purchased in great numbers by the working class.



FIG. 1. Hiroshige. “Evening Scene in Saruwaka Street.” *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*. 1856. (Cat. 178).



FIG. 2. Hokusai. "Yoshida on the Tōkaidō Road." *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*. 1830–33. (Cat. 34).

The majority of *ukiyo-e* served to advertise the people and places of Edo—the famous courtesans and Kabuki actors set against the popular tea houses, restaurants, brothels, and theaters of the day. Hokusai and Hiroshige also depicted these subjects, but are best remembered for their portrayals of the common person and for their innovative contributions to the subject of landscape, which became increasingly popular in the nineteenth century (fig. 2).

## LANDSCAPE

The fleeting beauty of nature and Japan's famous scenic places have been the subject of Japanese literature, poetry, and art for centuries. But landscape as a theme in *ukiyo-e* was a relatively minor one until Hokusai published his famous series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* around 1830. Shortly thereafter, Hiroshige also began to specialize in famous views of the Japanese landscape. Both artists responded to public demand for images of exotic places in Edo and beyond.

The reverence for nature and famous places is rooted in Japan's native religion, Shinto, which finds spirits residing in natural forms, such as a magnificent tree, waterfall (fig. 3), or mountain, such as Mount Fuji (fig. 10).



FIG. 3. Hokusai. "Kirifuri Waterfall on Mount Kurokami in Shimotsuke Province." *A Tour of Japanese Waterfalls*. 1833–34. (Cat. 52).



FIG. 2. Hokusai. "Yoshida on the Tōkaidō Road." *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*. 1830–33. (Cat. 34).

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## TRAVEL IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY JAPAN

Travel outside Japan was prohibited by the shogunate, but domestic travel increased dramatically during the Edo period. To ensure a stable central government, the shogunate required all regional warlords (daimyo) to reside alternate years in the capital city, thus weakening their finances and ability to organize a revolt in their respective regions. The impressive processions of daimyo moving between their regional homes and the capital became a common sight along Japan's highways (fig. 4). To facilitate their travel, the government built highways and waterways that connected the three major cities—Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka—with smaller towns and ports. The most important of these routes was the Tōkaidō or Eastern Sea Road.



FIG. 4. Hiroshige. "Daimyo's Departure at Shinagawa." *Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō Road, Station 2. 1832–33.* (Cat. 105).



FIG. 5. Hokusai. "Hodogaya on the Tōkaidō Road." *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji, 1830–33.* (Cat. 41).

Although people of all classes used the highways, the roads were strictly regulated with checkpoints. Whereas priests and entertainers could travel with relative freedom, commoners required official permission to do so. People often traveled under the pretense of religious pilgrimage, desiring to leave their routine life for awhile (fig. 5). Besides daimyo and pilgrims, other travelers included merchants delivering goods and entertainers on tour.

## WHAT WAS TRAVEL LIKE?

The 312-mile journey from Edo to Kyoto along the Tōkaidō Road took about two weeks. Notice the methods of travel portrayed in the prints. Most people walked to their destination in straw sandals, but many locals went barefoot (fig. 6). Nearly all luggage was carried by hand. Wealthier people traveled on horseback or in a palanquin (fig. 5). Daimyo owned their own palanquins, but others could hire one like a modern-day taxi. River and mountain crossings could be particularly treacherous and exhausting. Inns, restaurants, and souvenir shops sprung up along the highways to serve and entertain travelers.

## WHO ARE THE PEOPLE IN THE PRINTS?

The prints provide detailed information about the lives of all classes of people during this period. Although the overriding subject of the prints in this exhibition is landscape, the human figures, their expressions and gestures, as well as their clothing and accessories, are what draws us into Hokusai and Hiroshige's world (fig. 7).

Up until the late nineteenth century, Japanese people were divided into four hereditary social classes based on a Confucian philosophy of government. Ranked top to bottom, they were: samurai, farmer, artisan, and merchant.



FIG. 6. Hokusai. "Nakahara in Sagami Province." *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*. 1830–33. (Cat. 45).



FIG. 7. Hiroshige. "Junction with the Road to Kamakura at Totsuka." *Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō Road*, Station 6. 1832–33. (Cat. 109).

In Hokusai's "Yoshida on the Tōkaidō Road" (fig. 2) there are well-to-do female travelers enjoying the view of Mount Fuji at a tea house. These women are possibly wealthy merchants' wives, or geisha traveling to a performance outside of the city. They are served by a waitress, while their porters wait near a palanquin. Two male travelers, who may be merchants judging by their luggage, enjoy a smoke while resting their feet.

In "Nakahara in Sagami Province" (fig. 6), Hokusai depicts a local farm woman, who, with her baby strapped to her back, carries lunch to the fields. Merchants carry their goods on their backs or hanging from poles, and a fisherman pulls his net through the shallows below the footbridge.



**FIG. 8. Hiroshige. "Processional Standard-bearers at Nihon Bridge."**  
*Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō Road, Station 1. 1832-33. (Cat. 103).*

In Hiroshige's "Processional Standard-bearers at Nihon Bridge" (fig. 8), there are a host of characters representing everyday life in the capital city. The standard-bearers coming across the bridge signal the beginning of a daimyo procession that may stretch back several blocks, consisting of his samurai, servants, and horses, personal belongings, and of course, the daimyo himself carried in a palanquin. In the foreground, there are peddlers carrying their goods on poles bustling this way and that, a fishmonger balancing fish on his head, children at play, dancers dressed in white, and a monk moving quietly along the gate at right.



## KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI (1760–1849)

Hokusai was born in 1760 in Edo of unknown parentage, and was adopted by a prestigious artisan-family (fig. 9). As a young man, Hokusai worked for a book-lending shop and was later apprenticed to a woodblock carver. At the age of eighteen, Hokusai began training in print design under Katsukawa Shunshō (1726–1792). After his teacher's death Hokusai experimented with new styles and techniques. Around 1804, he studied Western art through Dutch copperplate prints, and began to depict landscape elements in a Western style using three dimensional shading and perspective.



FIG. 9. Attributed to Hokusai. "Portrait of Hokusai as an Old Man." Print published in 1900. (Cat. 1).

Hokusai's most productive period began when the artist was in his seventies. From 1830–3, he published his monumental series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* (figs. 2, 5, 6, 10, and cover). In this and subsequent landscape series, Hokusai depicts humans interacting with the natural environment—in awe of the power of a mountain waterfall (fig. 3), crossing a bridge famous for its scenic location, or longing for home while gazing at the full moon.

An eccentric artist, Hokusai changed his artistic name at least twenty times, even signing his works "Old Man Mad About Painting" in his later years. In 1797, he began using the name Hokusai, the best known to us today. Despite these eccentricities, Hokusai was a disciplined and prolific artist rising early in the morning and painting late into the evening. Hokusai died in 1849 at age ninety.



FIG. 10. Hokusai. "Reflection in Lake Misaka, Kai Province." *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*. 1830–33. (Cat. 40).



## UTAGAWA HIROSHIGE (1797–1858)

Hiroshige was born in 1797 in Edo. In 1809, he inherited his father's samurai position as warden of the Edo fire brigade. In 1810 or 1811, however, he began training as an *ukiyo-e* artist under Utagawa Toyohiro (1773–1829), whose interest in landscape prints, a minor genre at the time, influenced his young apprentice. In 1822, Hiroshige retired from the fire brigade to become a full-time artist.



FIG. 11. Hiroshige. "The Lake at Hakone." *Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō Road, Station 11.* 1832–33. (Cat. 115).

In 1832, Hiroshige reportedly traveled the Tōkaidō Road from Edo, accompanying the shogun's officials with his annual gift of horses to the emperor in Kyoto. Returning to Edo, Hiroshige immediately launched his monumental project *Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō Road* (figs. 4, 7, 8, 11, and cover), scarcely a year after Hokusai had published his successful *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*.

The city of Edo offered limitless artistic inspiration to Hiroshige. In 1856, he began his largest series, *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo* (fig. 1), an endeavor inspired by the city that fascinated all Japanese during this period.

In 1858, Hiroshige died suddenly at the age of sixty-two. He was a victim of the cholera epidemic that raged through Edo, which claimed 28,000 lives (fig. 12).



FIG. 12. Utagawa Kunisada (1786–1864). "Memorial Portrait of Ichiryūsai Hiroshige." 1858. (Cat. 101).

## WHAT ARE WOODBLOCK PRINTS?

Publication of woodblock prints was a complex process involving the collaboration of several people: the publisher, the artist, the woodblock carver, and the printer. Publishers were key figures in the printing process from start to finish. They assessed the market, hired the designer, supervised production, and arranged for distribution.

After a publisher had decided upon the subject matter for a print or series, an artist was commissioned to create the design. The artist drew his composition in black ink on a thin sheet of paper. Although artists might include notes and directions on drawings, they were not directly involved in the printing process.

The artist's drawing was then sent to the woodblock carver, who pasted it face down on a block of smooth cherry wood. The carver carefully cut away around the lines. The beauty and refinement of Japanese woodblock prints depended on the carver's fine touch.

The printer removed the residue of paper from the carved block and brushed the raised lines with ink. A sheet of dampened paper was placed on the block and rubbed vigorously with a *baren* (a flat, round tool made of twisted cord covered with a bamboo sheath), forcing the paper into firm contact with the inked lines of the woodblock. These line proofs were then given to the government censor for approval and to the artist for coloring.

Using the artist's hand-colored proof as a guide, the carver cut one block for each color. Each block included registration marks (*kentō*) to assure that the lines and colors would properly align on the finished print. Full-color prints required ten to twenty separate color blocks, each carved from a proof print pasted on the block. About 200 prints (the usual edition of any particular design) could be made in one day.



## THE COLLECTOR, JAMES A. MICHENER

(1907–1997)

Almost all of the prints in this exhibition were donated to the Honolulu Academy of Arts by the late novelist and collector James A. Michener, who gave the Academy about 5400 Japanese prints over several years (fig. 13). Michener began collecting Japanese prints in the 1950s and wrote several books and articles on the subject, including one of the first book-length studies of Japanese prints published in English.

Michener had a discerning eye and never hesitated to state his opinions about the merit of an individual print or artist. In *The Floating World* (1954), Michener compared the two great landscape artists Hokusai and Hiroshige, saying, “Hokusai was the bolder and more inventive . . . yet it must be pointed out that Hiroshige had an uncanny gift for placing himself in just the right spot to catch a marvelous composition” (p. 221).

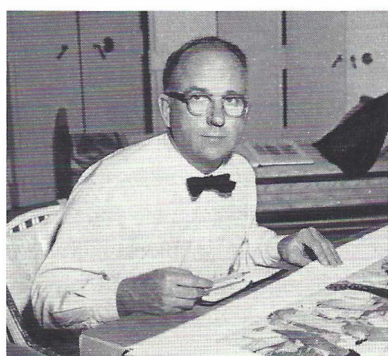


FIG. 13. James A. Michener viewing his collection in 1957.

## FURTHER READING

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## GENERAL VISITOR INFORMATION

The Asian Art Museum of San Francisco is one of the largest museums in the Western world devoted exclusively to Asian art. Opened in 1966 as a result of a gift to the City of San Francisco by industrialist Avery Brundage, the museum's holdings include more than 12,000 art objects representing more than 40 nations throughout Asia. As a result of a bond measure overwhelmingly passed by San Francisco voters in 1994, the museum is scheduled to relocate from its current location in Golden Gate Park to the Old Main Library building at Civic Center in 2001.

There are a variety of programs offered in conjunction with the exhibition. Please call our Visitor Information Line or visit our web site.

VISITOR INFORMATION: (415) 379-8801

INTERNET ADDRESS: [www.asianart.org](http://www.asianart.org)

CULTURAL PROGRAMS: (415) 379-8879

EDUCATION PROGRAMS: (415) 379-8839

MEMBERSHIP: (415) 379-8880

VOLUNTEER SERVICES: (415) 379-8808

LOCATION: Golden Gate Park (entrance from 8th Ave. and Kennedy Drive across from the Music Concourse, adjacent to the de Young Museum), San Francisco, CA 94118.

HOURS: Tuesday through Sunday from 9:30 AM to 5:00 PM, with extended evening hours until 8:45 PM on the first Wednesday of each month.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Design by Gordon Chun Design.

COVER: *Top*: Hokusai. "Under the Wave Off Kanagawa (Great Wave)." *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*. 1830-33 (Cat. 6).

*Bottom*: Hiroshige. "Driving Rain at Shōno." *Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō Road, Station 46*. 1832-33. (Cat. 151).